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The following is taken from Osservatore Romano, November 18, 1995. It was translated by Ms. Erica John, president of the Archdiocese of Milwaukee Supporting Fund, inc.

At its 64th annual meeting, the United States National Federation of Catholic Physicians presented the 1995 “Linacre Award” to Monsig. Cormac Burke, “Prelato Uditore della Rota Romana” since 1986, and visiting professor at the “Facolta del Diritto Canonico del Pontificio Ateneo della Santa Croce”. Monsig. Burke is known for his publications in the canon law field, and on the family and family morality. He is a professor of anthropology at the “Studio Rotale”.

In thanking the meeting, Monsig. Burke underlined the importance of the physician’s role — repeatedly stressed by John Paul II — in building “the civilization of love” with true human value: generous dedication, attention, and solidarity with the family.

In his recent “Letter to the family” the Pope has repeated his profound concern about the loss of the human and humanizing character of the family. According to God’s plan, the family has first place as school of humanity. The young people learn in the family how to treat their neighbors with humanity, and their horizons can become more human *within the family*. If today family life is weakening, if the family spirit is lost, the world is condemned to become less and less “human”.

“Fathers and mothers — said Monsig. Burke — have a special capability to transmit “humanity” when they treat their children with love. However, the process with which society can regain a sense of humanity is not limited to the family. Beside the parents, other figures have a special humanizing power as the priest who treats his parishioners in the right way, or the physician his patients”.

Addressing himself to the physicians he said: “You have a really strategic role in the task of rehumanizing the world . . . You are not engineers or technicians of man. You are physicians. Your horizon embraces the whole of humanity in the integrity of their nature. However, you must know their nature, remembering that a person is much more than a body, and that you must take care not only of

the body, but of the whole person. When a person is ill, or suffering, he is in a greater need of help. When the patient is in the physician's hands, he is aware of the way he is treated: as an object — namely a sick specimen of the human race, or as one of the many sources of income, or as a person, somebody who is unique, who cannot be bought at any price, but that can be redeemed only by the Blood of God's Son".

Regarding the problem of the terminally ill, and the inevitable view of the last stage of every human life, Monsig. Burke made reference to the subject of euthanasia and to death seen as a passage to the eternal destiny of man.

He said: "In these days when euthanasia has become topical, many are tempted to judge the value of their own or the other's life: wouldn't death be better for him, or for me? Lack of hope in life becomes desperation in death. But we cannot be desperate, neither about life nor about death. Through faith we know that the world and the life of every single person are in the hands of God, who not only loves everybody, but who is also omniscient and omnipotent. He is a God determined to give us the good beyond the evil . . . Therefore it is not right to give up hope. Is death better? Saint Paul thinks so when he says: 'Death is a gain for me' (Phil 1, 21), but that did not prevent him from dedicating all his life to the service of God and the people. Is death better? Not only can we agree, but we firmly believe that if we accept death as and when God will send it to us, death will be better, much better because then we will be really starting to live".
